

## **COLLOCATIONAL CHALLENGES OF UNDERGRADUATE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

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### ***Abstract***

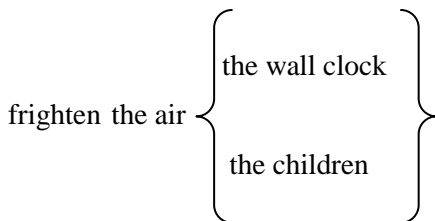
*Words are the building blocks with which we construct sentences and ultimately convey meaning. But words do not just combine at random to form sentences. Apart from the grammatical requirement of subjects to precede verbs and verbs to precede complements, words have co-occurrence relationships that constrain them to occur naturally with some words but not with others. In order to achieve fluency and ultimately intelligibility, language users in the ESL environment need to understand the selectional restrictions that preclude certain words from going together and others to go together. This paper examines collocational usage in the written English of undergraduate students of the University of Education, Winneba. Fifty essays of second year students across three departments of the University were purposively selected for this research. The findings revealed a large quantity of collocational misuse such as omission of collocational elements, reduplication, restructuring of collocations, substitution of a lexical element(s) within the collocational structure and wrong amalgamation of collocational elements.*

**Key Words:** Collocational Usage, Selectional Restriction, ESL, Structural Grammar

### **1.0 Introduction**

Collocation describes associations between vocabulary items with a tendency to co-occur, such as verb-noun collocations, adjective-noun collocations, or noun-noun collocations. It simply emphasizes words and the company they keep in every structure.

Collocation stretches also to mean the way words combine to form sentences and the selectional restrictions that cause certain words to go together and others not to go together. Words are the building blocks with which sentences are constructed and ultimately meaning conveyed. But words do not just combine at random to form sentences. Apart from the grammatical requirement of subjects to precede verbs and verbs to precede complements, we find that words have co-occurrence relationships that constrain them to occur naturally with some words but not with others. For instance, a verb like “frighten” is transitive and therefore grammatically requires an object. Technically, the object position can be filled in by any nominal element (e.g. a pronoun, a noun, a noun phrase or a noun clause). But in practical terms, not just any of these items can function acceptably as an object of the verb ‘frighten’. This is because since it is a word that has to do with the emotion of fear, it can accept as object only a word that has the feature [+animate], because only animate objects can have the emotion of fear. So, out of the following options –



– only the last is acceptable because it is animate and therefore has the emotion of fear. In other words, only the last can collocate with ‘frighten’. The other two cannot because ‘frighten’ has selectional restrictions that preclude them from occurring with it. In like manner, ‘blond’ collocates with ‘hair’, ‘flock’ with ‘sheep’, ‘neigh’ with ‘horse’. Some collocations are totally predictable, such as ‘spick’

with ‘span’, or ‘addled’ with ‘brains’ or ‘eggs’. Others are much less so: ‘letter’ collocates with a wide range of words, such as ‘alphabet’ and ‘spelling’, and (in another sense) ‘box’, ‘post’ and ‘write’. Yet other words are so widely used that they have no predictable collocation at all, such as ‘have’ and ‘get’.

Sometimes too, collocations occur in the form of set expressions, which must be used exactly as they occur. Many of these set expressions are referred to as idioms. The more fixed a collocation is, the more we think of it as an idiom – a pattern to be learned as a whole, and not as the ‘sum of its parts’. Examples: ‘consist of’, ‘look down on’, ‘do away with’, “tend to do something”, ‘be tenable for’, ‘make (both) ends meet’, ‘go to the end of the earth’, ‘at the end of the day’.

Native speakers of English usually have no difficulty handling the different collocational structures in the language, as these have been mastered and come to them intuitively, but in English as a Second Language situation (ESL) such as Ghana, this is certainly not the case, as many of the constraints on the co-occurrence of words remain to be mastered and applied (Ahulu, 2008). Worse still, while native English speech tends to be highly idiomatic, there is a distinct literal ring in ESL usage. That is to say that rather than the language users express themselves idiomatically, they tend to structure their sentences to state directly and literally what they mean. And this way, ESL speakers miss out on a lot of the idiomatic collocations of the language. And when collocations do occur, they are often restructured and unnatural.

## **2.0 Strands of Collocation**

Unkwuegbu, et. al. (2002) observe that ‘by collocation we mean the way that some words regularly go together with others, and our habitual and natural combination of words. To Crystal (1997) it is

...One way of imposing order on the thousands of lexemes which make up the English vocabulary is to group them into semantic fields ... it is obvious from dictionary definitions and thesaurus groupings that some lexemes do 'belong together'.

The most important influence on anybody's lexical usage is his/her choice of words. In simple language, this is the selection of words that we make in order to form a sentence in speech or writing. The idea of choice arises because for any one sentence, there is a possibility of selecting certain words instead of others. Egbe (1996) observes that "since the language users are responsible for creating the rules and deploying the words, they should also take the responsibility for ensuring that they have been applied correctly".

The notion of collocation focuses on the extent to which lexemes come together randomly or predictably. Often, a sequence of lexemes is governed by chance – that is, by factors which are controlled by an individual speaker, and not by tendencies in the language as a whole. For example, the sentence 'I like ...' gives us no clue about which lexeme will come next. This is because almost anything that exists can be liked. It is up to the individual to choose. Such sequences as 'I like dresses' or 'I like rain' are said to be 'free combinations' of lexemes. They are not collocations because there is no mutual relationship between the items. All that is required for a sequence of lexemes to be described as a collocation is for one item to 'call up' another, to some extent, in the mind of a native speaker. According to Crystal (1997) 'All mature native speakers use such sequences as "commit a murder" and not, say, "commit a task" even though the sense of "carry out" would be applicable in the latter case. And everyone says "monumental ignorance", not "monumental brilliance"'.

## 2.1 Some Fixed Collocations

The words we combine to form sentences are interrelated or ‘belong together’ in two ways –

(a) they have a *syntagmatic relationship* – that is, the way lexemes occur in sequence; and (b) a *paradigmatic relationship* – that is, the way in which lexemes can substitute for each other. Let us illustrate these with this sentence:

It was a very auspicious event.

On the horizontal (syntagmatic) dimension, we see that the word ‘auspicious’ naturally occurs (i.e., forms a sequence or collocate) with ‘event’ or ‘occasion’ – unless, of course, a literary or humorous point is being made (e.g., ‘it was a very auspicious kilt’).

Similarly, ‘piercing’ collocate with ‘scream’ (because a scream is so loud that it appears to pierce the ear-drums), but will not naturally collocate with ‘whisper’.

And on the vertical (paradigmatic) dimension, we can replace any of the words in the sentence with a word from related set of words, but not from an unrelated set. For example, we can replace ‘child’ with ‘boy’ or ‘girl’, and ‘piercing scream’ with ‘low moan’. Also, in these sentences:

A: Is that a new dress?

B: No, it’s an old dress.

The substitution of ‘old’ for ‘new’ results in a change of meaning that we recognize as an ‘opposite’. However, collocations relate to the sequential relationship among words rather than their substitution possibilities.

According to Ukwuegbu, et al. (2002) collocations can be classified into the following sub-headings.

## 1. Polywords

These are well known short phrases that function very much like individual words in the sense that their parts cannot be separated. In addition, they cannot be varied structurally. Examples are:

|              |                     |                |                  |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| by all means | once in a while     | in a nutshell  | once and for all |
| by the way   | so to speak         | so far so good | lest I forget    |
| all the same | as a matter of fact | all in all     | not again!       |

## 2. Institutional Expressions

These are polywords in that their structure cannot be varied and parts cannot be separated. But they are different because each functions as a complete sentence by itself, whereas polywords occur as part of completely expressed or clipped sentences. Institutionalized expressions include proverbs, aphorisms or maxims (true or wise sayings or principles expressed in a few words), and notable quotes. Examples:

Once beaten, twice shy.

How do you do?

Long time no see.

Have a nice day.

Discretion is the better part of valour.

The buck stops here!

Enough is enough!

More haste less speed!

The more you look the less you see.

## 3. Phrasal Constraints

These are short phrases, which like polywords, occur as parts of a sentence. But the significant difference is that they allow some degree of variation within them. Examples:

as you can see/tell/figure out...

as I was saying/mentioning ...

as it happened/turned out/transpired ...

good morning/afternoon/evening/night/day.

a day/short while/long time ago ...

as far as I can see/can remember/know/can recollect...

#### **4. Sentence Builders**

As the name implies, these are phrases that introduce whole sentences or provide the framework for constructing them. While they remain fixed themselves, they allow considerable variation within the rest of the sentence. Examples:

as you can see ...

let me begin by ...

the issue is ...

come rain or shine ...

the important point is that ...

the bottom line is that ...

that reminds me of ...

whether you like it or not...

#### **5. Idioms**

These are fixed groups of words with special meanings that are different from the meaning of the individual words that make them up. Idioms provide excellent examples of collocations and they abound in the English language. Here are a few examples:

(a case of) dog eat dog

a dog in the manger

a dog's breakfast/dinner

a dog's life

every dog has his day

give a dog a bad name

go to the dogs

let sleeping dogs lie

not have a dog's change

rain cats and dogs

the tail wagging dog  
learn an old dog new tricks

## 6. Other Fixed Expressions

The following are other fixed collocations the structures of which are frequently erroneously altered in the ESL environment:

to run for dear life, to protect life and property, to give one's word

to pay someone back in their own coin, to learn their lesson

to give a free hand, to rule with an iron hand, to turn a deaf ear (to an appeal)

to find fault with (someone), to speak in detail (about something)

to render selfless service, to have one's way (with somebody)

to reward someone ten fold/twenty fold, to put one's foot down

to leave no room/ margin for error, to appeal/ report to the school authorities.

to let bygones be bygones, to succeed at all costs,

to improve someone's conditions of service, to treat a matter on its own merits

to use one's good office to help another, to take great pains (to do something)

the powers that be, to say something times without number

to damage beyond repair, to effect repairs (on a damage)

## 7. Prepositional Verbs

Prepositional verbs are those verbs that obligatorily collocate with prepositions in sentence structures. This means that they must be followed by a preposition in the sentence. For instance:

My husband *dabbles in* politics from time to time. She *specializes in* grammar

The quarrel *resulted in* a fight. They have to *conform to* the regulations

You must *desist from* telling lies. We are to *refrain from* drinking alcohol.

The question *consists of* two major parts.

## 8. Phrasal Verbs

These are lexical verbs that are combined with one or two prepositions or adverbs also known as particles. Here are some examples:



round up (arrest/bring together/make a whole number), cave in (collapse)  
round off (conclude), and out (distribute), put up with (tolerate)  
give in (succumb), lie low (hide), give up (abandon)  
look down on (despise), do away with (discard), turn down (reject)

**9.** Rotimi Taiwo (ferotai@yahoo.com) talks about the spectrum of collocations, by which he means types, and identifies this spectrum as made up of the following:

**(a) Free combinations**, such as

|               |                 |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| run a risk    | make an attempt | run a business  |
| make way      |                 |                 |
| run an errand | make an effort  | run out of time |
| out time      | make            |                 |

**(b) Restricted combinations**, such as

- adjective + noun – hardened criminal, extenuating circumstances, beautiful girl,
- adverb + verb – readily admit, totally unaware, blindly follow, foolishly accept
- verb + noun – renovate a house, decorate the tree, paint the room, buy a car
- noun + verb – the brake screeched, the cloud drifted, tension heightened

**(c) Multi-word expressions**, such as:

- irreversible binominal – e.g., part and parcel, in leaps and bounds, bag and baggage
- phrasal verbs – pull out, give up, look down upon, put up with, come across
- idioms – to take the bull by the horns, to set the ball rolling, to see the writing on the wall

Taiwo concludes that words that are closely associated with other words ‘may depend in their association on the context of a particular situation’, context referring to who is using the words and where. For example, the word ‘power’ will collocate easily with ‘struggle’, ‘boat’, ‘house’, ‘steering’ in different contexts. He also points out that in many cases collocations depend not on compatibility in meaning among the component words, but rather on convention. For example, stale or spoilt butter is said to be rancid (i.e., ‘rancid butter’), while egg that is no longer good to eat is said to be addled (i.e., ‘addled egg’). What Taiwo means is that it is purely a matter of convention that the terms ‘rancid’ and ‘addled’ go with ‘butter’ and ‘egg’ respectively to describe their bad state.

English has many of these collocated expressions and some linguists, e.g., Khellmer (1991), argues that an English speaker’s lexicon is made up of many collocated words and phrases as well as individual items. Knowledge of collocation is important because when people have good ideas to express, they are often unable to do this successfully or effectively when they do not know the most important collocation of a key word that is central to what they want to say. The result is often outright error, or verbosity, or threatened intelligibility or a string of expressions that sounds awkward or unnatural to the native speaker of English. Hill (1999) gives the following examples of such inappropriateness:

His disability will continue until he dies. instead of: He has a permanent disability.

In the shell of a nut. instead of: In a nutshell.

When collocations are learnt, they increase the learner’s mental lexicon and his written and spoken fluency. The brain is said to have more time to focus on its message if ‘many of the nuts and bolts are already in place in the form of collocations of varying lengths’.

### **3.0 Selectional Restriction Rules (SRR)**

In collocational usage in English, one of the principal factors that play a role in how grammatical units can relate to one another in sentences is the principle of Selectional Restriction Rules (SRR). Selection restrictions, also known as selection constraints or sortal constraints, can be defined as “semantic constraints which a predicate imposes on its arguments” (Soehn, 2005). The phenomenon of SRR was first described by Chomsky (1965) as a “selection relation between two prepositions in a sentence”. To Myres and Blumstein (2005), selection restrictions are “those semantic restrictions that any verb places on the argument of the verb”. For example, the verb ‘mail’ in ‘Kofi mailed the letter.’ requires that the noun in the subject position must have certain semantic characteristics. The ‘mailer’ must be +animate, +human, and capable of volitional action. Likewise, the noun in object position must be something ‘mailable’ – it must be an object that does not exceed the size and weight restriction of the postal service.

According to Aarts (2001) selection restriction is ‘the restriction imposed by the predicates of the sentence on their arguments which can be handled in terms of thematic roles.’ Onuigbo (2005) explains that it is the rule that determines the co-occurrence of grammatical elements on the fact that ‘one element of a sentence just projects a feature which determines the other elements to be selected’. From the above, we can deduce that selection restriction is a constraint upon the possible messages which one can convey in a language. The violation of the rules of selection restriction, according to Yankson (2002), ‘tends to elicit very unfavourable responses from both the native and non-native speakers (of the English language) alike’. Therefore, such errors reflect badly on the speaker’s personality. They mirror his/her educational background and portray his grammar as poor and undeveloped. It is agreeable that nobody

learns a language without goofing. However, the violation of selection restriction rules by the users of the English language points to the fact that they are yet to master the language. In order to communicate effectively in English, therefore, the rules of the language must be mastered.

Unfortunately, however, the semantic features projected by some grammatical elements such as verbs and nouns are usually violated in the ESL situation (Bazza, 2016; Rashid et al, 2017). The features projected determine the co-occurrence of the grammatical units in sentences. To Chomsky (1986), Wagner (2005) and Ordem&Bada (2016), a noun may possess the following features: + – concrete, + – animate, + – human, + – plural, + – abstract, + – masculine] while a verb may possess such features such as [+ – animate, + – human, + – concrete, + – movement, + – liquid, + – surface. Most often, in the ESL environment these features are mismatched, resulting in unnatural, anomalous sentences that violate the rules of selectional restrictions. Such structures lack grammaticalness, acceptability and intelligibility to the international audience thereby resulting to a total communication breakdown (Frimpong, 2017).

#### **4.0 Statement of the Problem**

It is important to note at this point that evidence available from research conducted shows that previous studies on collocational usage and selection restriction rules violation were carried out among secondary school students, undergraduate students (Nigeria, Malaysia, Egypt), newspaper editorials and aphasic patients. And the researchers centred on written materials on subject/verb/object violations and extensively made use of active, passive and prepositional sentences which the study population was asked to interpret. They also centred on lines of poetry with a wide range of combinations of linguistic rule violation (Moore & Biederman, 1979, Anyawu, 1990, Hoffman

&Honeck, 1979; Myre&Blamstern, 2008; Nzerem, 2008; Serpil, & Yukeselir, 2015). This study recognizes all those but moves a step further to include undergraduate students in the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana; to the best of my knowledge, there has not been any study on the undergraduate students' collocational usage.

### **5.0 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- to identify erroneous collocational structures in the written language of undergraduate students of UEW.
- To classify these structures into categories.
- To account for them linguistically.

### **6.0 Theoretical Framework**

Structural grammar was adopted for this study. Structural Grammar Theory came about as a response to the inadequacies of the traditional approach to grammar, especially in relation to the latter's concept of Latin Grammar which was often inapplicable to the new kinds of grammatical structures that Franz Boas and his students encountered. This grammatical theory developed by Boas was done with the aim of describing the various Native American languages. It was developed because of the challenges they face with the grammatical structures of the then American native languages. The focus of structural grammar is usually on structures, which mean the forms of words (number, tenses, etc.) and the arrangement of words (word order) so as to facilitate construction of sentences.

Structural grammar usually draws a fundamental distinction between form and meaning. In other words, structural grammarians look at words from the point of view of form and try to derive meanings from such words. The model represents an attempt to create an integrated scientific theory of language with a well-defined theoretical base and methodology.

## 7.0 Methodology

This is a qualitative research approach which adopted the descriptive design. The data for this research were sourced from the written composition of the second year students of the University of Education, Winneba. The course titled Advanced Composition, a 3-units course, is taught at the Department of English Education and three departments registered for this course for these semester one of 2018/2019 academic year (the academic year the research was conducted) namely: Department of English Education, Department of French Education and Department of Special Education. On the whole, 352 students registered for this course and 50 scripts were purposively selected for this research.

## 8.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

Below is the presentation of the data collected for this study. The collocational structures are presented in context, the context for each collocation being the entire sentence in which it occurs. The relevant collocation in each sentence is highlighted and the sentences are numbered serially for ease of reference, beginning with DS1 (Data Sentence No. 1). The numbering runs continuously through all the selected scripts.

DS1: This will *enable us finish on time*.

DS2: The doctor said *she had stroke*.

DS3: This is *peculiar to Winneba alone*.

DS4: I stayed with them *for a good one year*.

DS5: He said he was not trying to *raise alarm*.

DS6: You are looking *young by the day*.

DS7: This second group are *fewer in number*.

DS8: Deregulation is a step in the right direction.

DS9: There is *an adage which says* that all days are for the thief...

DS10: The new policy is being *put to test*.

DS11: But *you suppose to know better*.

- DS12: I saw *that your friend* yesterday.
- DS13: You should go out *once a while* and relax.
- DS14: She was *on phone* when you arrived.
- DS15: It was *smooth sailing* all the way.
- DS16: Don't answer your phone when you *are on the steering!*
- DS17: It *does not worth* the trouble!
- DS18: They are determined to succeed *at all cost*.
- DS19: They voted by *secret ballot*.
- DS20: The car was *blue in colour*.
- DS21: This course will *enable me attain my goals* in life.
- DS22: He *dabbled into politics* without considering the implications.
- DS23: They counted *five-five volunteers* from each group.
- DS24: When they questioned him, he *responded by saying* that he knew nothing about the matter.
- DS25: I asked him why he was *frowning his face* at me.
- DS26: Causes of soil erosion *include* poor farming techniques, overgrazing, mining activities (galamsy), improper construction techniques, *among others*.
- DS27: *The rest students* were dismissed and asked to go home.
- DS28: Instead of settling the dispute, he was busy *knocking their heads together*.
- DS29: He died in *a motor accident* two years ago.
- DS30: She tried to *convince me to go* there with her.
- DS31: The regional MP *praises alarm* over the activities of the Sakawa boys.
- DS32: The TV manager *bags four years jail term*.
- DS33: He also *solicited for* some measure of debt relief.
- DS34: ...whoever sits *at the helms of affairs* as president of the nation has the authority to appoint whomever he deems fit.
- DS35: The workers broke the stones into *small small pieces*.
- DS36: The forum condemned *the company's administration* for its

high-handedness.

DS37: We paid a visit to the Dean's office but *met his absence*.

DS38: He pointed out to them that *one tree cannot make a forest*.

DS39: Their HOD's was the *second to the last* at the far end of the passage.

DS40: We congratulated him on the occasion of his *wedding ceremony*.

DS41: He shouted: "I *am seeing you*, don't move!"

DS42: Because we were not *hearing him* at the back, we left the venue.

DS43: Some of the town people said Kojo's eyes were not right, *his head was not correct*.

A rigorous syntactic analysis of the data reveals the following characteristics present in the collocational structures identified in the students' written language:

### **8.1 Omission of Collocational Elements:**

The collocations that exhibit this feature are presented below, each identified by the number assigned to the data sentence in which it occurs. The omission is marked with the symbol 'Ø' and to facilitate the subsequent discussion, the omitted item is given in brackets at the end of the collocation.

DS1                                   ...enable government Ø serve you better (to)

DS2                                   ...she had Ø stroke ( a )

DS5 / DS42                       ...raise Ø alarm ( the )

DS10                               ...put to Ø test ( the )

DS11                               ...you Ø suppose Ø to know (are, ed)

DS13                               ...once Ø a while (in)

DS14                               ...on Ø phone (the)



As we can see, the omitted items are all grammatical words, that is, function words. They are:

- a. the 'to' element of a to-infinitive verb ( DS1 )
- b. articles, definite and indefinite ( DS 2, 5, 10, 14 )
- c. the auxiliary verb 'are' ( DS11 )
- d. the preposition 'n' ( DS13 )

It is significant that no content words are omitted, indicating a concern to retain the meaning of the collocation intact. But it appears that since function words are peripheral to meaning, these could be omitted with ease.

### 8.2 Reduplication:

This feature was exhibited by the following collocations. The redundant section of each structure is italicized.

|      |  |
|------|--|
| DS3  | ...peculiar to human beings <i>alone</i>           |
| DS7  | ...fewer <i>in number</i>                          |
| DS8  | In my <i>personal</i> opinion, <i>I think that</i> |
| DS9  | There is an adage <i>which says that</i>           |
| DS10 | Some of our clients <i>include</i>                 |
| DS19 | <i>Secret</i> ballot                               |
| DS20 | Blue <i>in colour</i>                              |
| DS23 | five- <i>five</i> volunteers                       |
| DS24 | He responded <i>by saying that</i>                 |
| DS25 | He was frowning <i>his face</i>                    |
| DS26 | causes of x include.... <i>among others</i>        |
| DS35 | broke the stones into small <i>small</i> pieces    |
| DS40 | wedding <i>ceremony</i>                            |

As these examples show, the majority of cases of redundancy involve saying the same thing twice in different ways. And because different expressions are involved, the speakers are unaware of the redundant

repetition. For example, if something is *peculiar* to human beings, it applies to them alone. Someone's *opinion* is of course what he or she *thinks*, and is therefore *personal* to that person. In like manner, an *adage* is a saying; and to *respond* is to *say* something. *Balloting* is *secret* voting; and a crowd refers to *people*, not dogs or sheep.

In other cases (e.g., DS23: 'five *five*volunteers' and DS35: 'small *small* pieces') the repetition or reduplication involves direct transfer from the mother tongue, where concepts like uniformity and urgency are expressed by repeating the relevant lexical items.

### 8.3 Substitution of a Lexical Element(s) within the Collocational Structure:

This feature is present in the following recorded collocations. The foreign items are italicized and the usual ones are entered in brackets.

- DS15            it was *smooth* sailing (plain)
- DS17            it *does* not worth it (is)
- DS22            dabbled *into* politics (in)
- DS27            the *rest* students (other/ remaining)
- DS30            tried to *convince* me to go (persuade)
- DS32            *bags* four years jail term (receives)

A closer examination reveals that the substitution results from four factors, namely:

- a. Failure to recognize the right lexical items in formulaic structures (e.g. DS15).
- b. Confusion of meaning (e.g. DS30: ‘tried to *convince* me to go’). DS30 confuses the meaning of ‘convince’ and ‘persuade’. We persuade people *to act*, but convince them to adopt a certain line of *thinking*.
- c. Misuse of prepositions. As the data show, this is the most pervasive factor. The misuse of prepositions in English has proved to be a widespread and lingering problem, resulting obviously from the lack of overt usage rules to guide the user.
- d. Outright breach of grammar (e.g., DS17 ‘it does not worth it’ and DS27 ‘the rest students’)

#### **8.4 Restructuring of Collocations:**

This involves the extensive alteration of the structure of well-known collocations, as in the following. The correct or usual structure is entered in brackets after each example:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| DS 4 | For a good one year (for one good year)                  |
| DS12 | that your friend (that friend of yours)                  |
| DS16 | On the steering (sitting behind the steering wheel/ driv |
| DS28 | knocking their heads together (playing one off against   |

While some of these, e.g. DS28, may have resulted from an attempt to simplify the original collocations, others cannot be so easily accounted for. Many of the latter also involve grammatical breaches.

### 8.5 Peculiar Collocations:

These are collocations which may or may not have been influenced by the mother tongue but which have become notable usages in the ESL environment. The following examples occur in our data:

- DS37                But met his absence (he was not in)  
DS39                second to the last (last but one)

Other examples not in the data but from the researcher's introspection are present in the following sentences.

1. I will see you *next tomorrow*.
2. There are a lot of *chain gallops* on the road.
3. *I'm coming*. (meaning: "I'll be back in a moment.")
4. The community *conferred a chieftaincy title* on him.

### 8.6 Wrong Amalgamation of Collocational Elements:

Here, superficially related items are taken from two different structures to form a hybrid (and grammatically incorrect) collocation. The following examples clearly illustrate this: DS36: *the company's* administration. Similar structures include:

We advised them to *stay clear* of dirty politics.

He was warned to *guide against* pickpockets.

Sentence DS36 involves the faulty amalgamation of the expressions "company's administration" (which focuses on company itself) and 'the company administration' (which focuses on the administration itself). The contrasting expressions 'company's' and 'the company' are then merged to form the unacceptable hybrid 'the company's administration'.

### 8.7 Alteration of the Grammatical Property of Collocational Items:

Here, the grammatical features of some of the collocating items are altered, obviously inadvertently. Some of these alterations result in questionable variations, while the others yield outright ungrammatical

forms. Examples are given below, with the original grammatical property given in brackets:

|      |  |
|------|--|
| DS6  | looking young by the day (younger)                           |
| DS18 | to succeed at all cost (... at all costs)                    |
| DS29 | a motor accident (a motoring accident/road traffic accident) |
| DS32 | Bags four years jail term (four-year jail term)              |
| DS33 | solicit for x (solicit x)                                    |
| DS34 | at the helms of affairs (the helm of)                        |
| DS41 | I am seeing you, don't move (I can see you...)               |
| DS42 | Because we were not hearing you at the back, we left the v   |

The alterations are obvious from the data, and can be classified as follows:

- Those that involve the pluralization of nouns (DS34)
- Those that involve reducing plural nouns to singular (DS18)
- Those that involve turning lexical verbs to prepositional verbs (DS33)
- Those that involve splitting up compound words (DS32)
- Those that involve adding *-ing* to state-of-being verbs (DS41 and DS42)

Of all these, alterations involving the pluralization of nouns occur more frequently than the others.

## 9.0 Findings

A total of 43 sentences were analyzed. The analysis of these sentences reveals ten distinct characteristics of collocational structures. These are:

- Omission of collocational elements:** Our analysis reveals that this involved mostly function words, and that hardly any content words were omitted. And this is perhaps because of their important meaning bearing function.
- Reduplication:** This occurred mostly in the form of repeating the same thing in other words. But there were also instances

of pure reduplication, involving the repetition of the same word in sequence to express urgency, uniformity, and so on.

- c. ***Substitution of a lexical element(s) within the collocational structure:*** This occurred as a result of the confusion of related word pairs, and from the misuse of prepositions - a rather universal problem.
- d. ***Restructuring of Collocations:*** This occasionally results from an attempt to simplify the original collocation, while there is no apparent reason for the restructuring of others. Some result in grammatical breaches.
- e. ***Peculiar collocations:*** These contribute significantly in marking out Nigerian English as a distinct variety of the language. While some can be considered standard variation, others are so obviously sub-standard.
- f. ***Wrong amalgamation of collocational elements:*** This involves taking parts of two different collocations and amalgamating them to form a hybrid. As the label we have assigned to this phenomenon suggest, the amalgamation is faulty and therefore unacceptable as standard usage.
- g. ***Alteration of the grammatical property of collocational items:*** This involves among others, changing number in nouns, turning lexical verbs into prepositional verbs, transitive verbs into intransitive, and stative verbs into dynamic. The collocations resulting from these processes were all grammatically unacceptable.

## **10. Conclusion:**

This study reveals clearly that words do not operate as independent and interchangeable parts of the lexicon, but as part of a lexical system. It is therefore necessary for any user of English not only to build up an active vocabulary, but also to be aware of

collocation and the selectional restrictions on words as they enter into collocational relationships with other words.

To nurture this awareness, it may be useful to isolate the concept 'collocation in English' as a topic on the school curriculum and teach it to pupils, beginning from the junior secondary level in the ESL situation. This is because while most collocational usages come to the native speaker intuitively, the ESL speakers struggle along throughout their learning process to master the collocational usage in English. Again, teachers of English at various levels should make it a point of duty to draw the attention of the students to the use of the dictionary as the dictionary, apart from giving the meaning of words also helps in providing the reader with the right collocational usage in their expressions.

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